

State grants will clean up 2 old mercury mines

Kerana Todorov, Napa Valley Register, 9-5-11

A nonprofit organization based in Woodland recently received a \$1.4 million state grant to clean up the abandoned Twin Peaks and Corona mercury mines near Lake Berryessa.

Once the work is completed, the land could be donated to the Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District, extending the hiking possibilities on the popular Oat Hill Mine trail east of Calistoga, according to public officials and the nonprofit organization.

These old mining properties are a key piece of Napa County's trail plan, according to Tuleyome, an environmental organization based in Woodland.

"This project is a win for the environment, the landowner and Napa County residents," Napa County Supervisor Diane Dillon said in a written statement.

The Twin Peaks and Corona mines, located in the upper Putah Creek area, total about 440 acres, said Bob Schneider, senior policy adviser for Tuleyome.

The land belongs to John Livermore, whose family has owned properties in Napa County for generations.

A semi-retired gold prospector based in Reno, Nev., Livermore has tried to clean up the mines for years and donate the properties to a public entity, said John Woodbury, the Napa open space district's general manager.

But the district could not accept the liability that comes with the current mercury contamination, Woodbury said.

With the \$1.4 million grant from the state Department of Fish and Game, Tuleyome plans to hire experts from UC Davis to complete the remedial work, Woodbury said.

"They're going to do a really nice job," he said.

Livermore would like the county to preserve the Corona mine, which contains mine technology from the 1900s, 1940s and 1960s, as a tourist attraction.

Schneider said the cleanup work is expected to take three years. One goal is to keep mercury-contaminated mine water from reaching James Creek, a Pope Creek tributary that enters Lake Berryessa, he said.

The mines are two of about 40 abandoned mercury mines in the Putah Creek and Cache Creek region, according to Tuleyome.

Tuleyome would eventually like to create a Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area to preserve hundreds of thousands of acres from Lake Berryessa to the Mendocino National Forest.